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[September 18, 2006]

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PRESS RELEASE

National Poll Finds Economic Issues Top List of Citizen Concerns

The results of an opinion poll of 1,108 adults in Macedonia, conducted between August 29 and September 3, 2006, indicate increased optimism among citizens following the recent parliamentary elections. The state of the economy continues to be the most pressing issue for the vast majority of respondents; currently 85% of respondents cite unemployment, the economy, and the standard of living as the most important problems facing Macedonia today. Respondents are optimistic that the new Government will address these problems. When asked if Macedonia is moving in the "right" or "wrong" direction, 28% of respondents believe things are moving in the right direction, a 5% increase since March 2006, when this poll was last conducted. Additionally, a near majority of respondents (49%) believe the economic situation in the country will be better in two years.

The public opinion survey was carried out by the International Republican Institute (IRI) through an ongoing project funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), a part of the U.S. Mission in Macedonia. The actual survey was conducted by the local research supplier Brima, in collaboration with an American research firm, Williams and Associates of Salem, Massachusetts. The results of this poll were presented to representatives of various political parties in Macedonia during the week of September 18th, 2006.

"The survey results indicate that expectations of the citizens are high that economic reforms will move forward. This represents a real opportunity for the new Government, but also a real responsibility to deliver on its election promises. In addition, a constructive and engaged opposition is essential to ensuring that economic reforms remain high on the Government's agenda," comments Dick Goldman, Mission Director of USAID in Macedonia.

When asked what the new government's priority should be, a total of 70% of respondents identified issues related to economic development. Of these, 35% considered employment as the top priority, 26% cited the economy, and 9% viewed standard of living as the most important priority for the government to address.

When asked if Macedonia was moving in the "right" or "wrong" direction, 28% of respondents believe things are moving in the right direction. The poll also records a 12% decrease in those who believe Macedonia is moving in the wrong direction, at 31%. Pessimists now outpace optimists by a margin of only 3%, which is the narrowest margin witnessed since this polling project began in 1997.

According to the poll, 92% of respondents continue to believe that foreign investment is a key element in securing Macedonia's future economic growth. When asked from where the foreign investment should come, the majority of respondents (51%) continue to believe that no single source is more desirable than others. In terms of individual sources of foreign investment, 21% favor Europe, 16% favor the United States, and 2% favor Russia.

Support for Macedonia's membership in NATO and the EU continues at very high levels, and changes in this survey were slight. Support for entering the European Union dropped from 97% to 96%. Support for Macedonia entering NATO remains at 89%, one percentage point lower than the historical high for this response in the January 2006 poll.

The results of the opinion poll are available at www.USAID.org.mk

The American people, through USAID, have invested more than \$450 million in Macedonia since 1993. More than 20 projects worth \$30 million a year are currently being implemented. These projects are designed to support Macedonia's transition to a free market-based, multi-ethnic democracy. They include initiatives to accelerate economic growth, develop democratic institutions, and educate citizens for a modern economy. USAID provides economic and humanitarian assistance in more than 100 countries. For more information please visit <http://macedonia.usaid.gov>.

The International Republican Institute (IRI) works with Macedonian political parties to enhance their ability to identify and respond to issues of concern among the electorate and to provide citizens with increased avenues of participation. IRI utilizes public opinion polls to help political parties in issue identification and advocacy, message development, and communications and voter outreach. IRI polls are designed to keep parties grounded in the issues of real concern to the electorate.